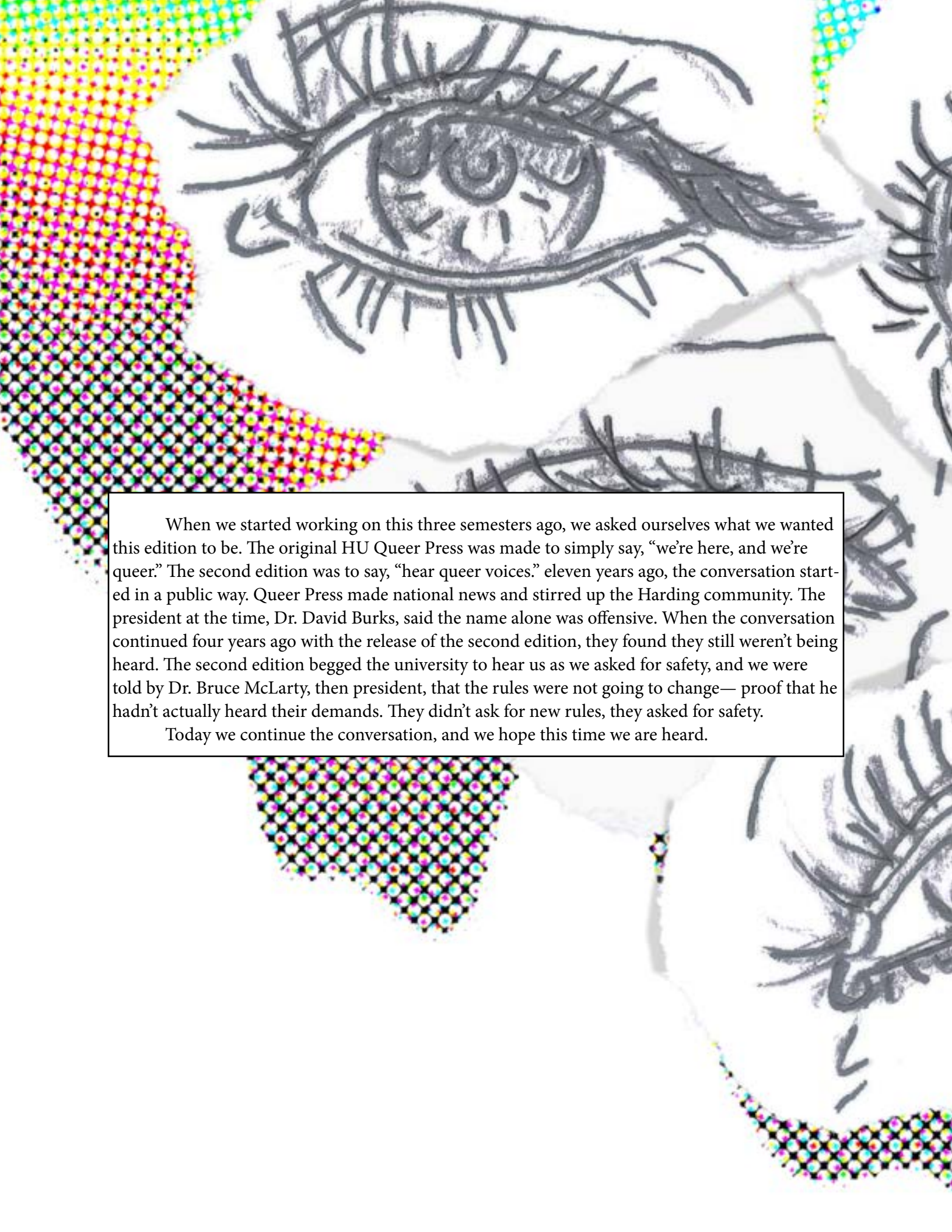


# Look Around



Queer Press 3.0





When we started working on this three semesters ago, we asked ourselves what we wanted this edition to be. The original HU Queer Press was made to simply say, “we’re here, and we’re queer.” The second edition was to say, “hear queer voices.” eleven years ago, the conversation started in a public way. Queer Press made national news and stirred up the Harding community. The president at the time, Dr. David Burks, said the name alone was offensive. When the conversation continued four years ago with the release of the second edition, they found they still weren’t being heard. The second edition begged the university to hear us as we asked for safety, and we were told by Dr. Bruce McLarty, then president, that the rules were not going to change— proof that he hadn’t actually heard their demands. They didn’t ask for new rules, they asked for safety.

Today we continue the conversation, and we hope this time we are heard.





Look around.

If you are straight, look down the hall of your dorm. One of those rooms holds a queer person. Look around your bible class. One of those chairs holds a queer person. Look around the student center. Someone queer is waiting for Chick-Fil-A and someone queer is serving it. Look around at your family reunion. One of your cousins is gay. A 2017 Gallup poll concluded that 4.5% of adult Americans identified as LGBT. It follows, then, that over 200 students at Harding University are queer. Look around. Find those students, and you'll find that Harding wouldn't be the same without them. I hope this edition helps you be the best ally you can be.

If you are queer, look around. You are not alone. Someone in your classes is queer, too, and even more in your classes are allies. You are not alone. I hope this edition finds you when you need it. This edition serves to show you that there is a place for you here at Harding, whether you chose to be here or not. I hope these resources help you find what you need to build a community here. This edition is for you.

When the last edition was released, I was happy to be camping out in my freshman year closet. My closest friends knew I was gay, and I thought I was one of the only ones here. I was breaking down at the idea of going back home and retreating further into the closet. I was terrified that I would never be able to tell people who I am. I was convinced that nothing would ever get better. Then I found Queer Press. Queer Press didn't make my parents less homophobic. It didn't make my school less homophobic. But it did make me feel less alone, and it made me feel like I could finally talk about the giant rainbow elephant in the room. Suddenly my peers and teachers were using all the buzzwords I used on the internet. People were actually talking about people like me. I hope this edition does the same for some young, queer freshman who feels like they're the only one. I hope this edition opens a healthy discourse that leads to the unburdening of closeted students. I hope this helps someone come out to their friends, if that's what they need. I hope this edition helps someone learn to love the queerness they were born and blessed with.

I hope when you look around, you find exactly what you need.

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# Queerness and Harding



F f A a G g









### **Harding's Box**

Made from ink and colored pencil, this first piece is about my negative experiences with being queer at Harding. Often, I feel forced into a “box” of conformity. I worry that if I were to be myself, I would be rejected by others. The figure on the left represents the anxiety of being outed to the wrong people and the danger it presents for myself and many of my queer friends. The red, blue, purple, and black rectangles represent anger, danger, sadness, and fear. However, despite this anxiety, my identity cannot be contained in a rigid structure, illustrated by the waterfall on the right. I am proud to be who I am.

## **You Belong at Harding (Unless You're Queer)**

Harding's rules for being gay are simple: don't be, and if you are, pretend you are not. Before you say "Harding doesn't say you can't be gay, it says you can't act on it," I urge you to listen. I was gay at Harding for 4 long, gay years. Before that I spent 4 gay years at Harding Academy's high school, and before that I spent an entire gay childhood in this town. As a freshman, I watched the release and response to HUQP 2.0 which made national news, like the queer press had before it. This new edition had been carefully crafted to follow Harding's rules- there was no swearing, no encouragement of sex, not even a plea to change Harding's stances. The magazine had a simple message: please hear queer voices.

As a freshman I watched Public Safety throw these magazines in the trash can, ignoring the rainbow "recycle" sign on the back cover. I watched the university grasp at straws to find a way these students had broken the rules: they distributed paper without Student Life's permission. I watched my classmates say "my social club does that" or "my book club does that." As a freshman, I listened to Bruce McLarty say, just days after, "you belong at Harding."

Who is "you?" Almost everyone. Dr. McLarty listed many groups including Black students, disabled students, and female students. There was one group he didn't list, though. The gay students. He even allegedly said "If students have a problem with the university's policies, they can go somewhere else. Then, like a sick joke, they pasted those words onto the student center for us to walk by every day.

"You belong at Harding."

I may not belong at Harding, but that doesn't matter, because I didn't get to choose my school. And I'm not the only one. All around you are queer students who are here because they have to be, or because they choose to be. All around you are queer students who make this campus a brighter, more loving place. We are in your club. We are in your major. We are in your dorm. That's not changing.

In a survey students conducted this semester that reached 117 students (2.3% of total enrollment), 67 students (1.3% of total enrollment) identified as queer or questioning. Over 1 percent of all Harding students responded to a small survey identifying as queer. Only just over 2 percent of all students responded, so it follows that there are many more queer students who never saw the survey. Look around you and pick the students who don't belong here. It's hard, right? Because Harding wouldn't be the same place if that those students weren't here. Those students belong at Harding.

We belong at Harding.



## **My Experience at Harding University as a Lesbian**

To get right to the point: it's not that great. There are many LGBTQ+ students attending Harding, all of whom have different stories and circumstances that brought them here. Personally, I came to Harding knowing that I liked girls. My plan was to let the school pull me away from my true sexuality. I hoped that if I surrounded myself with a faith-centered education, then something inside of me would change and I could be straight. A big part of me also believed that a Christian school like Harding, where we go to chapel everyday and take a Bible class every semester, would make me worthy of respect to my parents and the church community. I quickly realized that none of those things could ever change who I am or have any effect on my family and church respecting and hearing me as a lesbian.

I am not an English major or super good at writing-out emotions (I'm more of a report writing kind of girl), but what I can say is that life at Harding as a LGBTQ+ student is unfair and, at times, unsafe. The university fails to see us as part of the student body. Harding suspends students out of the program just for dating or outwardly showing attraction towards the same sex. The university also neglects genderfluid and nonbinary students by only accommodating those who are considered traditionally female or male.

In my experience, one of the worst aspects of being a student here is how my sexuality is outcast and considered nonexistent in the classroom. LGBTQ+ individuals and ideas are discussed in lectures, but it is never considered that people in the class could be a part of that community. We are only seen as future clients, cases, or dilemmas to be dealt with in the outside world sometime in the future. In reality, we are everywhere. We are in your classrooms, office hours, church pews, social clubs, dorm halls, and families. We see and hear everything and we are suffering.

As I reach the end of my junior year, I wonder if I could go back in time, would I do Harding all over again? Harding has a weird way of working with students. I actually would do it all again. A transgender friend once said to me, "Coming to Harding was the worst choice I ever made but staying was the best." I related to that statement and I think the reason why I get so frustrated and hurt by the policies and culture of Harding is because there is just so much potential goodness here that is wasted through unacceptance and ignorance.

I believe that ultimately, this is where God wanted me to be, despite all the signs Harding gives that say I do not belong here. I thank God and give all glory to him that I was able to keep my faith even at this university. In the future, I plan (and dream, pray, and hope) that I find a wife that works together with me to have a family centered around God. I wish that this university could support and guide me to reach those dreams just like they do for all other students.



### **My Freedom**

Made from ink and colored pencil, this second piece is about my positive experiences with being queer at Harding. Juxtaposed with the structured shapes and straight lines in Harding's Box, My Freedom utilizes curved, flowing lines and round shapes to illustrate the personal freedom I've experienced through finding queer friends and allies at Harding. The blue stands for peace, the red for self-acceptance, the green for growth, purple for empowerment, and yellow and orange for happiness and friendship. These individuals empower me through accepting me as I am, an unconditional love I never found in the church or my own family.





## I Hate Myself

This isn't who I am      I just wanna be free  
I honestly don't know what that is      I just wanna be me  
But there's this feeling that I get      I just wanna see what I could be  
And all this shame that comes with      I just wanna be fine  
I can't look you in the eyes      I just wanna make my time  
Because I'm scared they'll be different  
But I can't tell anymore lies      Last longer than 18 years  
As my symptoms simply worsen

I say I hate myself      I hate myself  
But it's not myself that I hate      But it's not myself that I hate  
I hate my body      I say I hate myself  
But it's not my body that I'm in      But it's not myself that I hate  
I'm trapped, confined      I hate my body  
I'm scared, but I'm not blind      But it's not my body that I'm in  
I hate myself      I'm trapped, confined  
But it's not myself that I hate      I'm scared, but I'm not blind  
I hate myself

This isn't who I am      But it's not myself that I hate  
Now I know who that is  
And it's not what you'd expect  
But it's what you get

I say I hate myself  
But it's not myself that I hate  
I hate my body  
But it's not my body that I'm in  
I'm trapped, confined  
I'm scared, but I'm not blind  
I hate myself  
But it's not myself that I hate

I just wanna be free  
I just wanna be me  
I just wanna see what I could be  
I just wanna be fine  
I just wanna make my time  
Worth the pain it's caused



## Flat Enough

It was times like these when he wished he could've been born like other boys; in a body that he knew. One he understood. A body that wasn't a stranger to everyone including himself. It was an odd feeling, being estranged from his own body. You look in the mirror and you don't recognize who you see. That person isn't you. They have the potential to be great, but they're just not you. And that's the thing that scared him. Can he just throw away the greatness that the girl in the mirror has to offer? Could he stand living the rest of his life in the body of a stranger? He looked down at his bound chest before sliding on a t-shirt. He glanced at himself in the mirror and turned sideways to further examine. He pressed the fabric of his shirt down, so that it was flush against him. It's flat, he thought, just not flat enough. Could anything ever be flat enough for me, then? It was a typical thought for him, a way for his brain to question his own sanity. He knew it would be flat enough, someday when that was how his chest really looked, but until it was, not quite flat enough would have to be flat enough.



## **“Why Don’t You Just Transfer?”**

One of the most common responses I hear when queer students advocate for better treatment is: “Well, if gay students hate the rules so much, they should just leave.” On the surface, this would appear to solve the pesky problem of homosexuality at Harding. Queer students shouldn’t fight for equal treatment or point out injustices; they should just pack their bags and quietly transfer to a state school where they will be out of sight and out of mind. Look any deeper, though, and this mindset falls apart.

For many LGBT+ students, transferring is a problem of logistics. Bible credits don’t transfer as anything besides electives, making those hours essentially wasted. Scholarships are often given with priority to first-year students, and transferring and moving can be an expensive process. Additionally, many parents will only financially support their child’s college if they choose a Christian/Church of Christ school. For a lot of LGBT+ students, transferring is just not possible. Harding will always have queer students because so many students don’t have another option.

As for me, the reason I am Harding is more personal than practical. Harding was the easy option. College applications came at the darkest and most depressing point of my life, and when you would rather write a suicide note than a college application essay, you take the easy option. The summer before my freshman year when all my friends were excited to move into their dorms and start their lives away from home, I felt nothing but dread. I was sure that there would be no other gay people at Harding, and that the next four years would be even worse than the past four years. Instead, I found a community that was both life-saving and soul-crushing.

On one hand, I found some of the kindest and most supportive friends I could ask for. I found people who love me for who I am, not a persona I pretend to be. I found other LGBT+ students with experiences just like mine. I have had amazing professors who have helped me learn so much and who I genuinely consider to be role models. As much as I complain about chapel, it is probably one of the last times I will get to sing acapella hymns with my peers, and I’d be lying if I said I’ve never teared up during the Greatest Command. If I had transferred, I would have missed out on so much love and wisdom and kindness.

On the other hand, I have also witnessed abhorrent behavior from students, faculty, and administration during my time at Harding. I have seen peers post 1 Corinthians 13:1 on their Instagram story only to say openly hateful things the very same day. I have watched as my friends with gifts for preaching are barred from using those gifts simply because they are women. I have listened to professors—professors that are upheld as Godly and righteous—tell the class that people like me will never have fulfilling lives or be happy. The same people who boast about “Christ welcoming everyone” on mission trips turn around and tell those being marginalized on Harding’s campus that if they don’t want to be discriminated against, they should just leave.

For so many LGBT+ students, transferring is not a viable option. But even looking beyond that, queer students should not have to decide between accepting maltreatment and finding a new school. There will always be queer people at Harding because queer people are not a fringe group hiding in the shadows. We’re already here. It’s time for Harding to stop closing its eyes and pretending it doesn’t hear the voices of the queer community, because we are not going anywhere.



# Queerness and the Church



## **The Incoherence of Religious Deconstruction: A Gay Case Against Progressive Christianity**

A sentiment I would hear regularly from youth ministers and preachers growing up is that it was “okay” to have doubts. This was a phrase clearly designed to assuage the anxieties of pre-teens whose relationship with Christianity was beginning to transition out of the honeymoon phase. The first cracks in the idealism of a church-going lifestyle typically appear around middle school, just as we’re hearing new ideas from people at school and finding the capacity to think independently of the adults in our life. These first steps outside of our childhood mindset are frequently followed by guilt and fear— after all, asking questions poses the risk of finding uncomfortable or unacceptable answers. Church leaders know all this, and they know that in order to ensure the continued religiosity of young teenagers they must make room in the doctrine for the experience of doubt. If they didn’t allow for questioning, if there was absolutely no breathing room for those kids who think twice, then they know that young people would jump the ship even sooner than they do now.

“Questions are normal,” my youth minister professed, “it’s healthy to talk about these things.” But these mantras are all veiled. The tolerance they express is highly conditional. Doubts are good and normal as long as they lead to one answer. Questioning is appropriate and healthy unless you draw the wrong conclusions. Within religion, the only acceptable result of your studies is the re-affirmation of inerrancy and dogmatism. And I don’t believe this to be some sinister warping of “genuine religion” at the hands of power-hungry Christians. I agree with the unspoken understanding behind these comments that religion ceases to be itself once it is allowed to question itself. If we’re working with the assumption that to be a Christian is to have complete faith in Jesus Christ, then a Happily-Questioning Christian appears to be an oxymoron.

Despite this, large numbers of forward-thinking young Christians embrace this reassurance uncritically. Hearing that doubt is good, they dive into the religious texts of their upbringing and find fulfillment in its dissection, attempting to smooth over the disparities between the feelings and experiences that precipitated the uncertainty and the comfort and familiarity they still get from religion. Today’s younger generations are highly favorable towards social liberalism, multiculturalism, and progressive economic structures; the tension they feel between the culture of their peers and the conservative message of their childhood leads them to frantically search for harmony between the two forces. In liberal Christian circles, this harmonization process is known as “deconstruction.”

A major aspect of this youth-led movement of religious reassessment is the affirmation of LGBT individuals. Opposition to homosexuality and the exaltation of gender roles remain some of the strongest pillars of modern Evangelical doctrine, but they are also in opposition to how most young people today understand society and people. This will be the primary contention dealt with in this essay. Just as modern Christianity prohibits genuine doubtfulness due to its dogmatic nature, the attempts by young liberal Christians to sanitize and modernize the church run contrary to its inherent conservatism and prove mostly futile. Additionally, the notion that

young queer people affected by religious bigotry should receive warmly the new wave of progressive, affirming Christianity will be challenged here as unhelpful, insensitive, and illogical.

The motivations behind liberal Christianity's reformation efforts are obvious, justified, and noble. A common early manifestation of religious doubt is the discomfort some people feel when being told that gayness is morally wrong. Even many little kids have the impulse that something very unjust is being taught when conservative church leaders use Bible verses to condemn homosexuality. Parents with less of a reactionary mindset may struggle to defend these cruel parts of the Bible to their children. Aversion to gay, lesbian, bi, and trans people is definitely a learned trait, taught by an ideologically unified, highly politicized, middle-aged network of church leaders and conservative thinkers. (The fact that a plain reading of the Bible seems to immediately support their position helps, too.) This system is partially responsible for the high rate of suicide among queer teens. In a 2015 study, it was found that LGBT young adults raised in a religious environment were twice as likely to attempt suicide than LGBT young adults who weren't.<sup>1</sup> The effects of these teachings aren't merely bad optics or reduced rates of church-going: they are fatal. Christianity kills gay kids and gives them no mercy while they're alive. The following options presented to LGBT people by the Evangelical church are few, heartless, and concrete:

- A) Commit to life-long celibacy.
- B) Attempt to change your sexual orientation and/or gender identity (conversion therapy).
- C) Ignore your sexuality and/or gender identity, pretend that you are straight and/or cisgender.

Each option is as distressing as the next. Option A tells gay teens that they will never be able to have their own family. As their peers go on dates, get married, and have children, they are asked to remain alone. They should expect no intimacy beyond friendship, no children beyond nieces and nephews, and no adulthood without loneliness. In the best-case scenario, they will die surrounded only by friends and siblings. Obviously, plenty of well-adjusted people live fulfilling lives without ever getting married or having children, but I suspect that none of these people would advocate for prohibiting a targeted handful of teenagers from ever hoping for a family of their own.

Straight clergymen will bestow Option A upon traumatized youth while being fully aware that they would never hold themselves or any straight Christian to that high of a standard. They know that it would take the gay Christian an infinitely-greater amount of willpower and effort to achieve the same level of faithfulness that a straight Christian can get by marrying anyone they choose. They even know that this searingly painful act of restraining one's pursuit of happiness and denying yourself a fulfilling future in the name of religion can cause massive mental turmoil.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy J. Gibbs and Jeremy Goldbach, "Religious Conflict, Sexual Identity, and Suicidal Behaviors among LGBT Young Adults," *Archives of Suicide Research* 19, no. 4 (March 2015).  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13811118.2015.1004476>.



Even then, the practice of celibacy may not be enough to shield LGBT people from the ire of the church. Hate doesn't exist because people aren't following the rules, it exists as a reaction to people's very identity. With the church's propping-up of heterosexual marriage as an unofficial sacrament, a celibate gay Christian will likely be met with the same intolerance and ridicule that they would've if they weren't celibate. This is despite the fact that they've worked much harder for their faith than the average parishioner.

I will give Option B less attention, as conversion therapy has been proven to be wholly ineffective and abusive. Not only do the ends not justify the means, the ends do not exist. Any adequately humane society would place a complete ban on the practice of conversion therapy, which is often endorsed and implemented by religious institutions. It has become common in recent years for conservative Christian zealots to claim that pro-gay legislation outlawing conversion therapy violates their religious rights. Time and time again, Christians voluntarily position themselves in direct opposition to the safety and sanity of LGBT people.

The final choice, Option C, is probably the oldest and most commonly enacted of the three. Religion is often the biggest reason that people stay closeted and that gay individuals enter into dishonest marriages. By choosing Option C, fearful and misguided queer people risk hurting the people around them with their closethood. Life becomes a performance, a deep inauthenticity that can create a permanent guilty conscience and an inability to form meaningful interpersonal connections. Option C sets people up for disaster, whether it be the trauma of divorce and being outed or the breakdown of trust that can ruin a family. This is the choice that LGBT youth will make in their own heads without consulting anyone. It is the "take it to the grave" option that has been popular for most of history. This and the other two choices can be cumulatively described as meeting the vulnerability and fear of LGBT teens growing up in the church with a prescription of hopelessness.

Liberal Christians notice the cruelty of these three paths and find it unacceptable. Their motives are pure and the dissonance they feel is so powerful that they search feverishly for reconciliation. Usually, this plays out as re-examining the Bible through new hermeneutics and cultural contextualization. The progressive wing of Christianity argues that the sacred book on which they were raised actually *is* LGBT-affirming, feminist, anti-slavery, et cetera. They confidently espouse limp caveats such as:

- "This isn't applicable to modern times!"
- "This was mistranslated centuries ago!"
- "This was thrown out by the New Testament!"
- "The authors didn't have the same concept of same-sex relationships as we do!"
- "This only condemns pedophilia, not homosexuality!"

It is framed as coincidental that these arguments line up closely with the speaker's preferred political ideology. Whether or not many of these claims are true, together they appear as a frantic and unimpressive attempt to rehabilitate the Bible in spite of its crimes. Liberal

Christians want desperately to preserve their relationship with the core spirituality of their religion while somehow denouncing the beliefs of the vast majority of their fellow adherents. They contort etymology and bludgeon history until everything uncomfortable is gone.

Although liberal Christians are endlessly more compassionate than their conservative Evangelical counterparts, their brand of religion regrettably appears much less consistent. It is an embarrassment that their ideology relies on mass quantities of external “evidence” to make it even remotely palatable. The hardline fundamentalism of Evangelical Christianity comes off as self-assured, certain, and clear, while the wishy-washy and nebulous progressive approach seems distracted, dispassionate, and unreliable. Why should the value of queer people be based on a foundation as flimsy and unclear as the liberal interpretation of Leviticus, Romans, or 1 Corinthians? Is their affirmation of gay people really as weak as “My unrecognizably-edited special book says I can accept you, so I do”? The validity of LGBT people should be asserted before consulting any religious tenant.

It appears that Christianity comes with a menu. On this menu are the countless beliefs, interpretations, approaches, styles, and denominations that all claim ownership of the religion as a whole. It is our task, apparently, to peruse the menu and find what fits us best. If you have problems with one piece of the Bible, don’t worry: there is a version of religion that edits all that out. If you dislike the rhetoric of one sect of Christianity, don’t worry: find a different sect that dislikes them, too. The existence of this menu gives religion a slippery quality; if I hate anti-gay scriptures so much that I allow myself to ignore them, why shouldn’t I do the same with other uncomfortable verses? If Christianity was wrong about gay people, what’s stopping it from being wrong about everything else? In my view, nothing is. If you’re progressive enough to denounce the Bible’s latent homophobia, then why aren’t you progressive enough to denounce its hatred of women and disabled people, its endorsement of violent retributive justice, or its perverse opinions on marriage and relationships? If you answer “I *am* progressive enough, I *don’t* agree with the Bible on those things,” then are you even a Christian anymore? You clearly prefer your own thoughts over religion’s, just like the rest of us. I guarantee that religion feels less and less true the more you examine it.

This leads me to believe that liberal Christianity is nothing but a bundle of contradictions, a chaotic feel-good movement that has no real understanding of itself. The insistence of liberal Christians to retain proximity to religion may even call into question the quality of their LGBT allyship. If you admit that religion is a major cause of LGBT youth suicides, why would you be so determined to reform its image? Why is continued association with a homophobic institution deemed acceptable? Too often, young religious progressives are happy to entertain their conservative counterparts and engage with their insidious beliefs as valid equals worthy of debate or discussion. This reduces the issue of homosexuality to a minor theological disagreement rather than a deal-breaking violation of human rights. In order to maintain their own comfort, liberals reject clear logical points: If something seems harmful, is used for harm, and requires great effort to appear less harmful, maybe it is just simply harmful. I believe that the

Bible does not deserve the reform efforts of well-intentioned people who have pointlessly suffered from its teachings.

It is also important to note that this iteration of progressive, LGBT-affirming Christianity is easier to embrace for liberal-minded straight and cisgender people than it is for queer people raised in the same culture. While straight allies may have come around to LGBT affirmation later in life, queer people first encountered the topic through self-reflection or even overt persecution. The first moment a gay teenager feels different from their family, when they notice that they might qualify as someone worthy of hate and disgust in the eyes of their parents and friends, is the first time they decide to bottle up parts of themselves and begin the mental rot caused by carrying too big of a secret for too much of a lifetime. I don't blame those who search for reconciliation at all costs; those who couldn't imagine living without Christianity but also felt disturbed and saddened by the Bible's teachings on homosexuality and gender. If forcing some kind of harmony on these two opposing interests is the only way by which someone can feel contented and truly happy, then so be it. But it should not be forgotten that reforming religion doesn't reverse its wreckage. There are so many gay young adults who are just now peeking out from the thick sheet of shame and fear placed upon them by conservative Christianity and who have no interest in revitalizing the image of organized religion.

I am a gay atheist. I gave Christianity plenty of chances, and it did nothing but make me feel worthless and ashamed. It is difficult for me to trust Christians my age who claim to affirm my identity while they continue to entertain the Bible, continue to break bread with people who see me as an abomination, and continue to insist that gayness is only acceptable because of a few linguistic technicalities. I don't want that kind of support.

You don't *have* to feel this way if you're gay, but I encourage you to consider it. Frankly, the belief that you can reform Christianity into a safe space for LGBT people is currently false. There is something innately hostile about the present form of organized religion that resists acceptance, no matter how strongly many would prefer this to be untrue. While I understand this may seem overly pessimistic or too harsh of an indictment of well-meaning people, I primarily intend to express to young queer people who have felt religious pressure for most of their lives that there is no need to treat the Bible gently or with reverence. If that book and the people who love it have hurt you, then I encourage you to discard it. Don't hesitate to prioritize your own worth over ancient scriptures. It *is* okay to have doubts and it's equally okay if your doubts lead you to abandon the entire faith itself. When mainstream Christianity says they want nothing to do with us, we should take their word for it and have nothing to do with them.



## The Christian Choice

I was raised to be Church of Christ, but by high school I knew the moniker wasn't fitting. I came to realize that everyone I loved had been hurt by the church—by this one specifically. I had watched my mother's friends suffer abuse, afraid to get a divorce; I watched the racism of Christians tear my town and church apart; I'd felt the hands of men in the Church of Christ on my body, and heard the tales of other little girls who had felt them too. Even as a child, without knowing exactly what the church was, I knew there was evil within it.

As I grew older I came to learn of a sin of my own. I fell in love with my best friend, another girl. I had known other gay people, and I'd always known that I loved them and that I believed they'd be with me in heaven. When I realized I was gay, though, it was different. I fought it hard, determined not to be one of those people my parents told me about. The ones who chose to be gay. My gayness would certainly not be my choice. I fought it until I was certain that these feelings were entirely against my will.

So there I was, unfortunately gay, and a regular church attendee. I poured over scripture, trying to find my loophole. Translational issues, context changes, bias written into the scripture. All the things my Harding professors had taught me to find. The more I dug, though, the more issues there were to find. The demon possessed pigs ran into a river named erroneously in the scripture. David, a man after God's own heart was a rapist, aldurer, and murderer. It is supposedly harder for a rich man to enter the gates of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, but Solomon, David, and Abraham, some of God's hall-of-famers amassed great wealth on earth.

I found my temple was crumbling around me.

If being gay was a sin, why did God make me gay? Why are only gay people supposed to remain celibate and unhappy? If being gay is not a sin, why does the Bible say it is? If that passage cannot be trusted, how can I trust any of the passages? If my entire faith is to be built on the idea that God spoke his word to us in the form of the Bible, but I know that word to be, at the very least, inconsistent and inaccurate, then my foundation is nothing but sand, waiting to be washed out from under me.

So I left the church before it could leave me. I don't feel called to be celibate and unhappy. I don't feel called to bend scripture into a shape that suits me. I don't feel called to observe the faith of my abusers, and I don't feel guilty for leaving the faith of my parents.

Because of how blatantly homophobic the church and scriptures are, I was forced to choose between being gay and being a christian. It's not really a choice, though. Because everyday I wake up gay. Everyday I go to bed gay. What happens in the middle is gay. If I went to church, it would be gay church, and if I didn't go to church it would be gay-not-going-to-church.

I was taught in christianity that god was steadfast and unchanging. He was and always would be. What I found, though, was that the image of god changed week to week, as his church did too. I found that the most consistent feeling in my soul wasn't a draw to god or a belonging to the church. The one unchanging thing was me. My gayness was new every morning.

Being gay is not a choice, but being a christian is.



## A Personal Account of Gayness and Goodness

I have always had a difficult time understanding that some things can be vastly insignificant and entirely consequential at the same time. After spending most of my adolescence attempting to iron out the dissonance between my sexuality and religion, I've somehow encountered brand new internal contradictions that I now must contend with as well. In one sense, being gay is merely a minor part of my overall composition. It's a private thing, a sexual thing, something that doesn't seem necessary for everyone to know in the same way that I don't need to know about how other people have sex. But there is an alternate understanding that I experience just as genuinely, one that sees my gayness used as a wedge between me and my parents, one that forces me to walk on eggshells in the conservative social environment I've never been able to leave, and one that prevents me from relating to so many aspects of so many people. My gayness is as essential as it is unimportant.

In elementary school, it was common to hear "gay" used as punchline or an insult. But by sixth grade, I had joined the youth group at my church, where people used "gay" in a much different way. On the rare occasion that the topic arose, the word was only muttered in cautious and delicate tones, evoking some combination of fear and pity. The youth minister's face would always become cold and serious, similar to when he told us not to watch porn.

"We need to love everyone," he told us with that distinct wariness. "But being gay is sinful, and loving people means not letting them sin."

Sin. There was no confusion on what that meant. Sinning was like lying to your parents and cheating on a test. It's something that God hates. Finally, I was able to categorize my working definition of gayness within a larger context. To be gay was to sin. Now, something that was once unclear and strange became dangerous and detestable.

My parents didn't talk about controversial topics much. Every so often, a visibly gay person would show up on TV. Within minutes, my dad would be reaching for the remote and switching the channel. The words weren't always there, but the actions were. Gayness made things awkward. It turned wholesome family time into an embarrassing event where my siblings and I brought our eyes to our shoes or fingers, pretending like we had no idea what we were seeing.

My questions didn't stay unanswered for much longer. I was a child of the Information Age, and I was smart enough to take advantage of the kitchen computer when my parents were asleep or out shopping. I don't remember googling "What is gay?" or anything that simple. I didn't even find porn, which I wasn't yet looking for. But hanging out on the Internet provided me with just enough cultural awareness to know all about queer people. *I'm so glad that's not me*, was my first thought. *Imagine how terrible it would be if that was me*.

By thirteen years old, I was sure I knew everything. Some people were gay, and that was complicated and awkward and bad. Being none of those things, I could be sure that I was not gay. But, unfortunately, puberty makes everything slightly more complicated than it used to be. The physical changes were mortifying and uncomfortable, yes, but the changes inside my head



proved to be infinitely more distressing. I was noticing things in new ways; I was noticing people.

All of the sudden, a friend that I had known since second grade became very interesting to me. He was three days older than me and we had almost every class together. My other friends were confusing and unrelatable, but he was nearly as quiet as I was. He was unbelievably kind and infuriatingly clever. I went to his house most weekends, swimming in his backyard pool or playing video games in his basement. Our parents drove us to “hang outs” on a fixed schedule because there was no one else that we’d rather hang out with than each other.

This friend had puffy black hair that flopped over his eyes and ears, and his lips curled over blue-and-purple braces that often had soggy Cheez-It bits stuck in them. His eyes were small-ish, blue, and surrounded by a light spattering of freckles. In an effort to look like him, I grew my hair out and puffed it up like he did. My hair was a different color, but I had the freckles and I had the eyes.

In seventh grade, I slept next to him at a slumber party. I remember getting up to pee, and noticing his sleeping face when I got back. His big braces hung out of his face sloppily and he had a tiny, faint snore. His thick black curls flowed across his forehead and radiated across his pillow like a Renaissance painting.

I was amazed. His face created a peaceful warmth inside my chest, something that felt completely new and invigorating. I clutched the feeling tightly inside my mind as I pulled myself back into my sleeping bag. I had never been so confused or so content. Nothing so small had ever made me so infinitely happy. It was incomprehensible and it was even shocking, but it was entirely good. It felt nothing like lying to your parents or cheating on a test. I couldn’t even trick myself into feeling guilt over it. It was just good.

We held hands on the bus and we hugged every time we left each other. It was innocent and silly but it was a million times better than any spiritual high God had ever given me. While God was distant, vague, and complicated, my friend was close and simple and real.

He and his family moved out of state later that year. I could hardly cope with the departure, but I wasn’t so young anymore. I was fourteen and puberty had granted me shame. I knew how to restrain myself and how to appear normal. He left like any other classmate would, and I went to high school by myself.

I knew what I felt could be described as gay, but I convinced myself that feeling gay was not the same as being gay. Throughout high school, I felt similarly about other guys. But I knew I couldn’t be gay, because I wasn’t evil. I wasn’t sinful. I didn’t choose it, so it couldn’t be true. Every year that passed made the ruse harder to maintain. By eighteen, the extent that I was lying to myself became ridiculous.

I became suffocated by secrets. I forced myself to fake it. I went to church and I agreed that homosexuality was immoral. I kept my guard up at all times and I never let the illusion fade. I could marry a girl and have kids and go to church like a normal person, because being abnormal was as good as being dead. Every single friendship I had was surface-level and artificial because I could disclose so little. I was a husk of a person, with no personality, no

interests, and no opinions, more afraid of being outed than I was of dying. Eventually, the pressure became so terrifying and miserable that I allowed myself the luxury of being honest with myself. I put it in writing for the first time at age nineteen, and a year later I came out to a friend for the first time, feeling a sense of once-impossible relief. In some way, it was a tiny reminder of how my friend's sleeping face felt. Goodness consuming shame. The instinct to survive overpowering fear.

Once one person knows, it gets easier to tell someone else. Over the course of a year, most of my friends knew. I was finally meeting people that I didn't need to come out to because they never knew me as straight. I even told my parents. Of course, they were surprised and upset; we spoke for about twenty minutes until the questions stopped coming and all that remained was the grating mental noise of a relationship stretching and bending itself beyond recognition. They don't like it and they don't support me, but they love me. I've dealt with so much internal dissonance that I suppose I can handle that one, too. All I asked was that they'd listen to me, let me get this out, and they did that. Whatever comes next is their problem.

It's ridiculous how much time I've had to dedicate to my sexuality. I imagine if I was straight and ready-made for the good graces of society, then I could have spent my teen years with a lot less worry and fear. But I'm growing to like being gay. It's easy, obvious, and fun as hell. It's so normal to me that I find it stupid I ever resisted it. There's been a lot of resistance for a long time, whether it's the tension between myself and my parents, myself and religion, or my pride and my privacy. But at this point, I've learned to just sit with the contradictions and let them exist alongside me for a while. I could hardly move on until I did.



## Living with Fortitude

There are several cardinal virtues, four to be precise. But the one most prevalent in my own life is fortitude. Fortitude can be defined as the strength to live in the face of persecution and maintain both composure and courage throughout. Just by looking at me, as if judging a book by its cover, I don't think that fortitude would be the first cardinal value anyone would expect of me. However, their initial judgment would be wrong as fortitude is the most significant and most important for me to maintain at this stage of my life.

Too often society undermines the experience of queer youth. For those that live in unforgiving households, realizing the truth about their sexual orientation is a living hell. I can say this with confidence because I myself have experienced this specific living hell. Yes, you read that right. I don't claim to know a lot about fortitude out of narcissism, I do so because I have been facing persecution within my own home, church, and school for years. I faced this persecution unbeknownst to my persecutors, but the flames still burned, and the slaps still stung.

I do not use the word persecution lightly. Upon realizing that it was not just boys that I was attracted to, my world began to crumble around me while my parents complained that they couldn't understand why I was so depressed and anxious. "You have the perfect life" they told me, time and time again, refusing me the medication and therapy for which I begged. On paper it did appear that I had the perfect life, I was on track for valedictorian, varsity cheerleading, the lead in school plays, I was a part of a family that was together, etc. But unfortunately, life just isn't that simple.

My household was one of love but one of judgment. My parents preached a Christlike love but when it came to people with whom they disagreed, that Christlike love was nowhere to be found. I recall many times in which my parents would hear of someone's child coming out as homosexual and they would exclaim, "I don't blame them for kicking their kid out, that's what I would do too, it is disgraceful and disgusting." I would hear these things day in and day out which only made me feel progressively smaller, unwanted, and unloved.

The hatred didn't stop at home though, it extended into both my church family and the university I chose to attend. The men at church would pray for families who had queer children and pray that those children would turn from their sinful ways and return to Christ. They preached a message as if you cannot love someone for the content of their character instead of their genitals and love God as well. I then chose to attend a university that legitimately kicks its students out if they are outed as homosexual and in a homosexual relationship to the administration. I courageously but painfully chose a university that preaches that homosexuality is a disgraceful sin that should be eradicated and punished just because a Christian man years ago said so in a letter that eventually ended up placed into the Christian Bible.

I cannot escape the persecution unless I cut out a part of my identity and force myself into a life of lies, and even then, I will still feel the burn of those I love speaking horrifically of people who are like me. Every day I fear that someone who does not see love the way that I do will find out that I cannot see gender when falling in love with someone and out me to my university or parents. And yet I persevere, maintaining my composure and loving my persecutors anyway because I hope that one day, they will learn to humanize their opposition instead of the alternative. I know that one day my parents will disown me and be left with no children, as I am the only child. I know that I will be disowned by the church family I love in the village from which I come, and they will pray for me every Sunday, but not prayers for my safety or health but prayers that I will turn from my wicked ways. I know that if I were to trust the wrong person in the next three years of my college career and tell them of this secret, I would be expelled and forced to relocate and lose my scholarships simply because I am capable of loving wom-



en, or trans people, or nonbinary people the same way that I am capable of loving men. The actions of these persecutors are much like the actions of those that Alan Jacobs speaks of in his book, *How to Think*. Jacobs details what he calls the “Repugnant Cultural Other” [or RCO] as those that dehumanize their opponents in order to feel superior. This RCO is a mindset of many of the Christians with whom I have come into contact. These persecutors dehumanize homosexuals as animals who are overly sexual beings who do not care about God or anyone else but themselves and their “primal urges”. Instead of fighting to see the people with whom they disagree as people who might just love the same flavor of ice cream, the same books, and most importantly, the same God that they do, these hateful Christians choose to simply see them as sinners. One of the many problems with this is that everyone is a sinner which is the whole foundational reasoning for why Jesus died on the cross, to save the world that he loved [and still loves] from their sins. Homosexuals are no less worthy of God than an elder, a sweet grandma, a gambler, an adulterer, or a thief, and yet the church professes homosexuality as so much worse than numerous “serious” sins that cause direct harm.

My parents, my university, and the church [at least the church of Christ] tend to act upon the Bulveristic method that Jacobs speaks about in which someone “assume[s] that [their] opponent is wrong, and then explains his error”. These groups of people neglect to listen to the other side and in doing so, make grand steps toward pushing away entirely these people with whom they disagree. Each time that my parents speak poorly about queer people as a group it tears out a piece of my heart and yet I force myself to lift my head and exemplify fortitude. I exemplify fortitude by looking my parents in the face with as much courage as I can muster and fighting for the respect and rights of people like me without letting them know why I am such an avid human’s rights activist. I have to stand up in bible classes both at church and my university and try to make people see that these people that they hate and call disgusting are just that, people. I stand up and speak boldly in my classes on the off chance that something I say will resonate with even one person in the room and trigger within them a domino effect that knocks down a whole wall of hatred and replaces it with understanding.

I don’t expect people to change their opinions on whether homosexuality is a sin. However, what I do expect is that people who profess love will stop acting in hate and start listening to people who just want to be heard and want to be loved. I pray that as the years go by, fortitude won’t be the cardinal value in which I practice most often but that I will get the chance to focus on my temperance. I am already sick of listening to people whom I love and respect debate my rights right in front of me without even recognizing the anguish they are putting me through. I am sick of sitting on my father’s lap sobbing as he holds me because I just want to talk to him --about the kinds of things for which he would promptly disown me-- while he sings me the song with the lyrics that I don’t even feel are true but that I desperately wish were, “I’ll love you forever, I’ll like you for always, as long as I’m living, my baby you’ll be.” These past six years I may have learned a lot about how to live with fortitude, but I wish that I hadn’t. The persecution and trauma [which I have not specifically included but that I promise are there] that I have lived through may have made me stronger and more courageous, but the toll that they have taken on my mental health and relationships with those that I love is immense. Thirteen is too young to be by lying on the bathroom floor sobbing because you have been told all your life that God doesn’t approve of gay people and so you assume that you are going to hell and that your parents will die on their deathbed having not loved their only daughter in their last moments. Frankly, any age is too young to experience this and I pray that in the future, society as a collective group does better at meeting queer youth where they are and not forcing them to live years hiding and forced to stand up in the face of persecution and maintain both composure and courage, to live with fortitude.

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# Title IX



This artwork features sketches of the eyes of three former Harding presidents.

## How Harding Gets Away with It

The Harding administrators take meticulous care in making their prejudiced dogma acceptable under the law. As citizens, we like to imagine that our government always protects the vulnerable and marginalized from the types of discrimination Harding exhibits. But, in reality, plenty of legal avenues exist that allow religious-conservative institutions like Harding to skirt around important anti-discrimination measures and conduct business without regard for the rights of queer people. To state it clearly: Harding “gets away with it” through Title IX exemptions.

Title IX is the best-known section of a large piece of education law passed by the U.S. Congress in 1972. It is notable for prohibiting “discrimination on the basis of sex” by schools that receive federal aid; its supporters considered it an essential extension of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Earlier federal anti-discrimination legislation had stopped short of protecting women, making Title IX was an important moment of progress in that sense. It is not always clear, however, that Title IX protections apply to LGBT people as well.

The Obama administration considered LGBT people to be protected by Title IX, and released guidelines to schools for addressing queer students. The Trump administration made the opposite interpretation; the Department of Education under Trump made multiple statements denying Title IX’s ability to protect queer students, especially targeting those who were transgender. In 2020, the Supreme Court ruled that gay and trans individuals were protected from employment discrimination, but did not provide any clarification on the extent of Title IX or the rights of LGBT people in schools. Ultimately, discrimination against queer people is mostly acceptable under United States law, which makes it remarkably easy for Harding to maintain its explicitly homophobic culture.

We are not exaggerating or being sensational. At Harding, students can be suspended for dating someone of the same gender. This alone is an egregious affront on individual liberties, but the attacks don’t stop there. Our behavior and expression, essential pieces of anyone’s identity, are policed by the administration. Students cannot exhibit behavior “suggesting a romantic relationship with a person of the same sex.” We cannot dress or act how we like, as Harding requires our gender identity to align with our “birth sex.” LGBT students at Harding are not allowed to be themselves; the performance of straight-ness and cis-ness is written into the rulebook (Harding University Student Handbook 2021-22, Section 4). Harding wants to keep it this way.

The following letters are official correspondence between Harding University and the U.S. Department of Education, in which former President Bruce McLarty formally requests to be exempt from Title IX. These letters are public documents; by publishing them, we hope to dispel any claims that Harding’s anti-LGBT stances are subtle or merely implied. The discrimination is purposeful. Harding wants gay and trans students to feel persecuted. According to McLarty, this type of discrimination has “characterized Harding from its beginning.”





# HARDING

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

*Bruce D. McLarry, D.Min.*

May 31, 2016

Ms. Catherine E. Lhamon  
Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights  
Office of Civil Rights  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20202-1100

Re: Claim of exemption from certain aspects of Title IX of the  
Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681, on the  
basis of religious tenets

Dear Assistant Secretary Lhamon:

Harding University (Harding) respectfully claims an exemption from certain aspects of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, 20 U.S.C. § 1681 *et seq.* (Title IX), based on the sincerely held religious beliefs of its Board of Trustees and its founding fellowship, the Churches of Christ. Recent declarations of Title IX enforcement intentions by the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, if applied to Harding, will violate the religious tenets of Harding and its controlling religious body, the Churches of Christ. Specifically, Harding claims an exemption, on religious grounds, from Title IX and its implementing regulations, as such apply to students, prospective students, employees, or prospective employees and issues involving gender identity and sexual orientation.

Title IX "shall not apply to an educational institution which is controlled by a religious organization if the application of this subsection would not be consistent with the religious tenets of such organization," 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(3), or, as the regulations put it, "to the extent application of this part would not be consistent with the religious tenets of such organization." 34 CFR § 106.12(a). Though Title IX itself doesn't require an

educational institution to submit a formal writing claiming an exemption, the regulations do. 34 CFR § 106.12(b).

Harding was founded in 1924 by members of the Churches of Christ. Its mission is to provide a quality education that will lead to an understanding and philosophy of life consistent with Christian ideals. Harding is founded and operated upon a hierarchy of governing documents that detail its formation, operation, and maintenance and ensure its faithfulness to its founding religious educational purpose and founding religious body, the Churches of Christ. These documents include, among others, the (1) Articles of Agreement and Incorporation (the Articles), (2) Board of Trustees Policy Manual, and (3) Faculty and Staff Handbooks. Together, these documents provide the framework through which Harding exists, operates, and is governed.

**1. Harding is controlled by members of the Churches of Christ.**

**1.1. All members of Harding's governing board are and must be members in good standing of a Church of Christ.**

The Articles establish Harding's purpose as providing a Christian education:

The purpose of this corporation is to establish, maintain and operate institutions of learning in which boys and girls, men and women, may obtain an education of standard quality in a conservative Christian environment. (Article IV in part)

In view of that purpose, the Articles limit membership on the Board of Trustees *solely* to members of the Churches of Christ:

The said university and institution of learning shall be under the management, direction and control of a Board of Trustees (the Board) to be composed of not less than seven (7) nor more than thirty (30) persons, each of whom *shall be* of legal adult age and *a member of*

*the church of Christ in good standing.* (Article V, § 1)  
(emphasis added).

Consistent with the Articles, the Board of Trustees Policy Manual specifically identifies membership in a Church of Christ and an excellent reputation within a local congregation of the Church of Christ as requirements for Board members. The Policy Manual also requires that all prospective Board members identify the name of the local Church of Christ of which he or she is a member and church leadership positions held. These directives ensure that Harding is and will continue to be controlled by members of the Churches of Christ.

**1.2. With a narrow exception, all full-time faculty must be members of the Churches of Christ.**

- A. The Articles of Agreement and Incorporation, with a narrow exception, reiterate that each full-time faculty member must be a member in good standing of the Churches of Christ:

It is realized that many universities have not long adhered to their original purposes. Therefore to assure the realization and the permanence of the stated purpose of Harding University it is required that each member of the Board and each member of the faculty and administration of the University shall profess an abiding faith in the Christ as the son of God, in His virgin birth, in the genuineness of the miracles as reported in the Bible, in His death and resurrection for the redemption and justification of men, and finally in the Bible as the divinely inspired word of God, delivered to us by the prophets and the apostles as a complete and unerring guide in all spiritual matters and all avenues of worship. *It is further required that each shall be a member in good standing of a church of Christ that supports these principles.* In event of emergencies, temporary exceptions for faculty members only may be made by action of the Board upon recommendation of the

President. (Article IV, relevant excerpt) (emphasis added).

- B. The Faculty Handbook, with the narrow exception in the Articles of Agreement and Incorporation, requires Church of Christ membership of all faculty members.

The Articles of Incorporation require that each member of the faculty “shall profess an abiding faith in the Christ as the son of God, in His virgin birth, in the genuineness of the miracles as reported in the Bible, in His death and resurrection for the redemption and justification of men, and finally in the Bible as the divinely inspired Word of God, delivered to us by the prophets and the apostles as a complete and unerring guide in all spiritual matters and all avenues of worship.” Each member of the faculty “shall be a member in good standing of a church of Christ that supports these principles.” The Board of Trustees may grant exceptions in accordance with the charter. (Faculty Handbook § III.1).

- C. Before a new faculty member is hired, he or she must present three spiritual references, including one from a minister or elder at the Church of Christ where he or she is a member. All three references must discuss the faculty member’s involvement and attendance at a Church of Christ.
- D. Each faculty member must affirm as part of an annual evaluation that he or she is a member in good standing of a Church of Christ and attends services weekly.
- E. The requirement that faculty be members in good standing of a Church of Christ is part of a contract that they sign annually.
- F. Harding’s nondiscrimination statement reserves the right to discriminate based on religion:



Harding University does not unlawfully discriminate in employment practices on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, age, sex, disability, handicap, or prior military service. Unlawful discrimination is prohibited by Title VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act as amended, and other applicable laws and regulations. *Specific exceptions regarding religious discrimination exist for a religious institution such as Harding University.* (Emphasis added.)

### **1.3. The Churches of Christ are congregational rather than hierarchical.**

“The largest of the three principal bodies of the American restoration movement, Churches of Christ are located throughout the nation but concentrated in the South and Southwest. Because this is not a denomination but a brotherhood with no central headquarters, activities such as record keeping are very difficult. Recent efforts show the membership to be about 1,250,000 in nearly 13,000 churches.

“A distinctive plea for unity—a unity that is bible-based—lies at the heart of the Churches of Christ. It is believed that the Bible is ‘the beginning place,’ in and through which God-fearing people can achieve spiritual oneness—to ‘speak where the Bible speaks and to be silent where the Bible is silent’ in all matters pertaining to faith and morals. Consequently, members recognize no other written creed or confession of faith. In all religious matters, there must be a ‘thus saith the Lord.’

...

“The leaders among the Churches of Christ in the nineteenth century were more conservative than their counterparts among the Disciples of Christ. Stressing strict adherence to the New Testament pattern of worship and church organizations, they refused to join any intercongregational organization such as a missionary society. Worship was simple, they

opposed the addition of instrumental music on the grounds that the New Testament did not authorize it, and the early church did not use it.

...  
“Today, one of the outstanding features of the Churches of Christ lies in the acceptance of the Bible as a true completely adequate revelation. The basic concept has resulted in such practices as weekly observance of the Lord’s Supper, baptism by immersion, a capella singing, a vigorous prayer life, support of church needs through voluntary giving, and a program of preaching and teaching the Bible. This concept also explains the autonomy of local churches governed by elders and deacons appointed under New Testament qualifications; dignified worship services; enthusiastic mission campaigns; and far-flung benevolence, all financed by local churches.

“The scriptural doctrines usually classified as conservative are found in Churches of Christ: belief in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as members of the Godhead; the incarnation, Virgin birth, and bodily resurrection of Christ; the universality of sin after the age of accountability, its only remedy the vicarious atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ. A figurative rather than a literal view is prevalent with reference to the book of Revelation. Membership is contingent upon an individual’s faith in Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of God, repentance, confession of faith, and baptism by immersion for the remission of sins. Church attendance is stressed.

...  
“Properties owned by the group probably exceed \$2.5 billion in value. There are 21 colleges, including one in Japan and several in Europe; 70 secondary and elementary schools; 83 child-care facilities, 46 senior citizen facilities; and 117 periodicals, newspapers, and magazines published throughout the country.” (Handbook of Denominations in the United States; Mead, Frank Spencer, 1989-1982. Abingdon Press, 1995, Pgs. 91-93. ISBN: 0687014786)

**2. Churches of Christ believe that all sexual relations outside of heterosexual marriage are sin.**

Because Churches of Christ seek to base what they believe and practice about marriage and sexual relations on the Old and New Testament

Scriptures, Churches of Christ point to such passages of Holy Scripture as those listed below as providing the position they should hold:

- A. Hebrews 13:4 – “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”
- B. Leviticus 18:22 – “Do not have sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman; that is detestable.”
- C. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 – “Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with other men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”
- D. Romans 1:24-28 – “Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth about God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error. Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.”

From such passages, those in the Churches of Christ believe it is not God’s intention for people to engage in homosexual behavior. For Harding to be true to its founding documents and the sincerely held religious belief of its controlling church constituency, it must continue with the view that homosexual practice is sinful, a view which has characterized Harding from its beginning.

**3. Churches of Christ believe gender identity is given by God and is revealed in one's birth sex.**

This view comes from Holy Scripture and is based upon Scriptures like, but not limited to, Genesis 1:27: "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." The original account of the creation of human beings shows God's original intention of creating two and only two distinct sexes.

Based on this and other passages, Churches of Christ would oppose a person's attempt to modify his or her birth sex or present as a sex other than his or her original birth sex, and would consider one who does so to be engaged in sinful behavior.

**4. The beliefs of the Churches of Christ in these areas are further demonstrated by Harding's previously claimed exemption regarding these matters, which the Department of Education has recognized.**

This letter is supplemental to Harding's exemption letter of July 21, 1976, in which Clifton L. Ganus, Jr., Harding's president at that time, wrote:

The revealed will of God indicates only two sexes—male and female. Furthermore, the only sexual relationship approved by the Scriptures is that found to be between a male and female in wedlock. Therefore, all sexual relationships other than that one cannot be condoned. In substance, Harding College must always reserve the right to take action against persons involved in heterosexual relationships outside the holy union of wedlock and in homosexual relationships.

....

Because our religious tenets strongly oppose extra-marital sexual and homosexual relationships, Harding must reserve the right to exclude students, faculty members, or staff



members, male or female, who violate the Scriptures concerning such relationship.

In response to Harding's claimed exemptions from Title IX based on same-sex relationships and gender identity, the Department's predecessor, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, responded, "Title IX does not preclude institutions from imposing standards of morality so long as those standards apply equally to members of both sexes. Rules, regulations, and practices which do not differ on the basis of sex and are applied in a manner which results in equitable treatment of both sexes are in compliance with Title IX. We should, perhaps, note in this connection that Title IX does not address the question of homosexuality—it prohibits discrimination based on sex, not actions based upon sexual preference."

Therefore, in one sense, this exemption is repetitive. But considering the Department's recent declarations of Title IX enforcement intentions, we wanted to restate Harding's long-held sincere religious beliefs on these matters and the Department's acknowledgment of those beliefs as either being protected by Title IX's religious exemption or not covered by Title IX at all.

#### **Specific Exemptions:**

Based on the religious control, religious heritage, and sincerely held religious beliefs of Harding and the Churches of Christ, Harding claims a religious exemption from Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and all related implementing regulations, which would violate the sincerely held religious beliefs of Harding and the Churches of Christ.

This claim of religious exemption includes but is not limited to the following regulations growing out of Title IX and as they may later be amended:

- 34 CFR § 106.21 Admission;
- 34 CFR § 106.23 Recruitment;
- 34 CFR § 106.31 Education programs or activities;
- 34 CFR § 106.32 Housing;
- 34 CFR § 106.33 Comparable facilities;

- 34 CFR § 106.34 Access to classes and schools;
- 34 CFR § 106.36 Counseling and use of appraisal and counseling materials;
- 34 CFR § 106.37 Financial assistance;
- 34 CFR § 106.38 Employment assistance to students;
- 34 CFR § 106.39 Health insurance benefits and services;
- 34 CFR § 106.40 Marital or parental status;
- 34 CFR § 106.41 Athletics;
- 34 CFR § 106.51 Employment;
- 34 CFR § 106.52 Employment criteria;
- 34 CFR § 106.53 Recruitment;
- 34 CFR § 106.55 Job classification and structure;
- 34 CFR § 106.56 Fringe benefits;
- 34 CFR § 106.57 Marital or parental status;
- 34 CFR § 106.58 Effect of State or local law or other requirements;
- 34 CFR § 106.59 Advertising;
- 34 CFR § 106.60 Pre-employment inquiries; and
- 34 CFR § 106.61 Sex as a bona-fide occupational qualification.

By submitting this letter claiming exemptions, Harding does not concede that 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)(3) requires it to submit exemptions to or request approval of exemptions from the Department of Education. Neither does Harding agree that Title IX addresses gender identity or sexual orientation. Harding nevertheless claims these exemptions based on the Department's recent declarations of Title IX enforcement intentions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce D. McLarty", written in a cursive style.

Dr. Bruce D. McLarty

# Resources

## Community Resources



**Lucie's Place:** Provides LGBTQ young adults experiencing homelessness in Central Arkansas with safe living environments, job training & counseling services in order to ensure lifelong stability & success, & works to promote equality & acceptance for LGBTQ young adults.

300 S. Spring St., Ste. 715  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

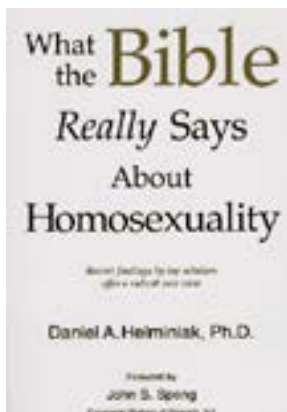
**Searcy Outsiders:** Meets weekly to provide a safespace for queer people.

Led by Harding students, this group provides community for those looking for other queer people. Meetings include weekly discussions, movies, game nights, and other activities.

Wednesdays at 8 pm  
720 Golf Course Dr.  
Searcy, AR



## Literature



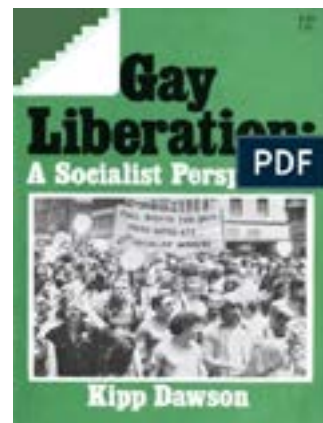
***What the Bible Really Says About Homosexuality:*** Top scholars—such as Yale history professor John Boswell and New Testament professors L. William Countryman of Berkeley and Robin Scroggs of Union Theological Seminary—show that those who perceive Bible passages as condemning homosexuality are being misled by faulty translation and poor interpretation.

Available for physical and digital purchase on Amazon and eBay.

***Gay Liberation: A Socialist Perspective:*** This pamphlet first appeared in the June 1975 *Young Socialist*, the monthly Newsletter of the Young Socialist Alliance, from which it is reprinted by permission. Kipp Dawson was the Socialist Workers Party candidate for U.S. Senator from New York in 1970. She was later a staff member of the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC).

Available online and at the link below.

<https://www.marxists.org/subject/lgbtq/pamphlets/Gay%20Liberation-Kipp%20>



***I Am Your Sister:*** Audre Lorde was one of the most important radical black feminists of the past century. Her writings and speeches grappled with an impressive broad list of topics, including sexuality, race, gender, class, disease, the arts, parenting, and resistance, and they have served as a transformative and important foundation for theorists and activists in considering questions of power and social justice.

*I Am Your Sister* is a collection of Lorde's non-fiction prose, written between 1976 and 1990, and it introduces new perspectives on the depth and range of Lorde's intellectual interests and her commitments to progressive social change.

Available online and at the link below.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1De4izh9ASVrnMVoQnpwIfaur1u\\_9Ok](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1De4izh9ASVrnMVoQnpwIfaur1u_9Ok)



## Film and TV



***Trans in America: Texas Strong:*** In this Emmy Award-winning documentary, Kai Shappley, a then-six-year-old, explains some of the discrimination she faces at her public school in Texas and in her community. ACLU follows Kai and her mother, a devout Christian and trans-rights activist as they protest Texas' "bathroom bill." Today Kai and her mother continue to protest Texas' anti-trans legislation.

Available on YouTube at the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cuIkLNsRtas>

***Boy Erased:*** Adapted from the biography of a man from Arkansas, *Boy Erased* shows the horrors of conversion therapy, which is still legal in 30 states. Garrard Conley, on whose biography the movie is based, is the son of an Arkansan baptist preacher. He recieved conversion therapy at a facility in Memphis, TN. The facility still exists today as "Restoration Path" but claims to no longer administer conversion therapy. *Boy Erased* was nominated for several awards, including a Golden Globe, and recieved the GLAAD award for outstanding Film in 2019.

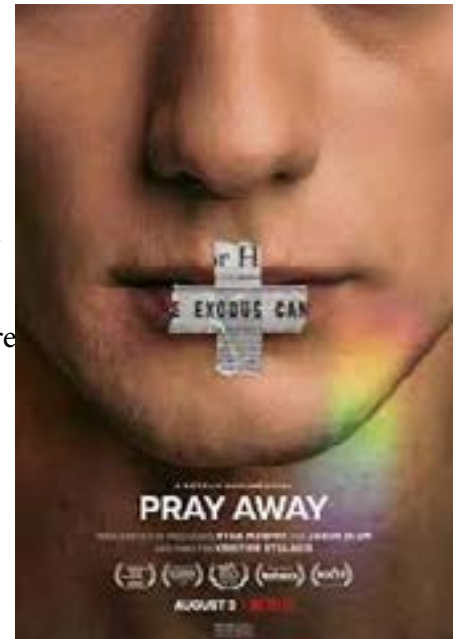
*Boy Erased* is available for purchase online and for stream on Peacock TV.





**Pray Away:** Released in 2021, this documentary follows survivors and administrators of religious conversion therapy, primarily focusing on a group that was known as “Exodus International.” Exodus paraded around “ex-gay” members of various denominations in order to “help people who wished to limit their homosexual desires.” The organization eventually closed, denouncing conversion therapy and apologizing for the hurt and pain it had caused. The film also includes sections on conversion therapy methods that are still used in practices today, including through at Living Hope Ministries.

*Pray Away* is available for streaming on Netflix.



## Online Resources

### Boston Public Library

Boston Public Library has an extensive collection of LGBTQ+ Youth and Adult Resources including [parent resources](#), [teacher resources](#), and [teen resources](#).

Available at the link below.

<https://guides.bpl.org/QUILT BAG/onlineresources>

### Library of Leftist Literature

A student-compiled library of leftist data, research, essays, resources, and theory. Though this library only has a few resources on the LGBTQ+ community specifically, it offers education in other fields of study within leftism including religion and economics.

Available at the link below.

[https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1\\_kTwdOhPDyYvjCAWeyurnk66NfoS-DxD?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_kTwdOhPDyYvjCAWeyurnk66NfoS-DxD?usp=sharing)

### GLAAD

GLAAD rewrites the script for LGBTQ acceptance. As a dynamic media force, GLAAD tackles tough issues to shape the narrative and provoke dialogue that leads to cultural change. GLAAD protects all that has been accomplished and creates a world where everyone can live the life they love. GLAAD has a large collection of resources for LGBT youth and adults.

Available at the link below.

<https://www.glaad.org/resourcelist>

# CDC

Positive environments are important to help all youth thrive. However, the health needs of LGBT Youth can differ from their heterosexual peers. On this page, find resources from the CDC, other government agencies, and community organizations for LGBT Youth, their friends, educators, parents, and family members to support positive environments.

Available at the link below.

<https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm>

## Crisis Resources

### **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Available 24/7

### **Crisis Text Line**

Text TALK to 741-741

Available 24/7

### **TrevorLifeline**

1-866-488-7386

Crisis intervention and suicide prevention phone service available 24/7/365.

### **TrevorText**

Text START to 678-678

Confidential text messaging with a Trevor counselor, available 24/7/365.

Standard messaging rates may apply.

**IF YOU OR SOMEONE  
YOU KNOW IS IN  
DANGER CALL 911  
IMMEDIATELY**

# Letter to the President

Dr. Williams,

Welcome to Harding. I hope you're sitting down in your new office to read this magazine, and I hope you'll find something valuable in it. I hope you can make your mouth form the words "Queer Press," unlike Burks, and I hope you grasp the demands expressed, unlike McLarty.

In your presidential announcement, you expressed a wish to restore love and compassion. You can restore love by making every student feel welcome at Harding. Restore compassion by putting an end to the homophobic ranting in Bible classes. I beg you to usher in a new era for Harding that puts her students before her donors. Forfeit your Title IX exemption. I dare you to challenge what the presidents before you have taken for granted. Don't cower when asked to renounce the sins of Harding's past and don't hide behind tradition when asked about Harding's future.

You have been given a position of power, but more than that, you have been granted the opportunity for change.

Harding is being presented to you as what she is. A school that is hemorrhaging students. A school that clings to a Title IX exemption. A school that is afraid to do what her sister schools began a long time ago: progress. A school centered around a church that loses more and more young Christians everyday.

So what are you going to do about it?

olivia i



and maybe  
little, but  
it was  
best and  
we knew





# Glossary

**AFAB** (adj.) — Refers to someone who was assigned female at birth.

**Ally** (n.) — Someone who is not queer, but is supportive and affirming of queer identities.

**AMAB** (adj.) — Refers to someone who was assigned male at birth.

**Androgyny** (n.) — The condition of having both masculine and feminine characteristics, as in appearance, attitude, or behavior.

**Aromantic** (adj.) — Refers to someone who does not feel or feels very little romantic attraction.

**Asexual** (n. / adj.) — Someone who does not feel or feels very little sexual attraction.

**Beard** (n.) — A person who is dated by a queer person in order to hide the queer person's sexuality.

**Bicurious** (adj.) — Refers to someone who is typically attracted to the opposite sex but has a slight or unexplored interest in the same sex.

**Binder** (n.) — A tight garment that is used to conceal or flatten breasts, typically by a transmasculine person.

**Bisexual** (n. / adj.) — A person who is attracted to two or more genders. Often interchangeably used with pansexual.

**Bottom** (n.) — The receptive or passive partner during sex.

**Butch** (n. / adj.) — Refers to someone, typically a lesbian, with masculine traits or expression.

**Cisgender** (adj.) — Someone whose gender corresponds to their assigned sex.

**Closeted** (adj.) — The state having one's sexual orientation or gender identity entirely or partially concealed from others.

**Coming out** (v.) — The process by which a queer person discloses their sexual orientation or gender identity to other people.

**Conversion therapy** (n.) — The theoretical practice of changing one's sexual orientation or gender identity. Considered abusive and ineffective.

**Crossdressing** (n. / v.) — The act of wearing clothing that is traditionally associated with a gender that is not your own.

**Deadname** (n.) — The name that a transgender person used before their transition.

**Demisexual** (adj.) — Someone who primarily feels sexual attraction towards those they have a close personal or emotional connection.

**Drag** (n.) — The act of performing gender in an exaggerated manner, often for the purpose of entertaining.

**Dyke** (n.) — A slur used for WLW, especially lesbians.

**Faggot** (n.) — A slur that is used for WLW, especially gay men.

**Femme** (n. / adj.) — Refers to someone, typically a lesbian and sometimes a gay man, who has a feminine gender expression.

**FTM** (adj.) — Female to male; refers to a person who is assigned female at birth and identifies as male. Used preferentially by some trans men.

**Gay** (adj.) — A term that typically refers to homosexual men, but can also be used as an umbrella term for queer people in general.

**Gender** (n.) — The range of characteristics pertaining to femininity and masculinity and differentiating between them. Depending on the context, this may include sex-based social structures and gender identity.

**Gender-affirming surgery** (n.) — A type of surgery which is meant to alleviate gender dysphoria and align one's physical body with their gender identity. Many transgender and non-binary people choose to undergo surgeries of this type, while others do not.

**Gender expression** (n.) — The way in which a person expresses their gender identity, typically through their appearance, dress, and behavior.

**Gender identity** (n.) — A person's internal feeling of being or having/lacking a certain gender.

**Genderfluid** (adj.) — Refers to a person whose gender identity fluctuates or is composed of characteristics from multiple different genders.

**Hermaphrodite** (n.) — Having both male and female genitalia. This term is now only used when referring to animals.

**Homophobia** (n.) — Prejudice towards gay/queer people. Includes using slurs, condemning homosexuality, and believing homosexuality is something to be fixed.

**Heterosexual** (n. / adj.) — A person who is primarily attracted to people of a different gender.

**Homosexual** (n. / adj.) — A person who is primarily attracted to people of the same gender. This term is typically used in academic, scientific, or medical contexts. In most other cases, "gay" is preferable.

**Intersex** (adj.) — The state of having physical and sexual characteristics that cannot be clearly categorized as male or female. Intersex people can be of any gender.

**Lesbian** (n.) — A term that typically refers to homosexual women.

**LGBT+** (n.) — Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, etc.; An acronym referring to the queer community. It is often expanded (LGBTQIA+) to include more specific identities.

**Misgender** (v.) — The act of referring to someone by the wrong gender or pronouns.

**MLM** (n.) — Man loving man; includes gay men, bisexual men, and any other man attracted to men.

**MTF** (adj.) — Male to female; refers to a person who is AMAB and identifies as female. Used preferentially by some trans women.

**Neopronoun** (n.) — Neopronouns are a category of neologistic English third-person personal pronouns beyond 'she', 'he', 'they', 'one', and 'it'. Neopronouns are preferred by some non-binary individuals who feel that neopronouns provide more options to reflect their gender identity more accurately than conventional pronouns.

**Nonbinary** (adj.) — Pertains to people who identify outside of, between, or to both binary genders. Does not necessarily indicate gender presentation or androgynous qualities. (Sometimes shortened to “NB/nb”; Noun form: enby)

**Out** (adj.) — The state having one's sexual orientation or gender identity entirely or partially revealed to others.

**Outing** (v.) — The act or practice of revealing a person's sexual orientation or gender identity without their consent.

**Packing** (v.) — Using materials to give the appearance of a penis.

**Pansexual** (n. / adj.) — A person whose attraction does not depend on gender identity; “gender-blind.”

**Passing** (adj.) — Being perceived by society or by people as cisgender and/or heterosexual or being perceived as one's gender identity.

**Polyamory** (n.) — Having multiple romantic partners. Occurs across all sexual orientations and genders.

**Pride** (n.) — Confidence, self-respect, and solidarity as expressed by gay people, associated with openness about one's own sexual identity, and the celebration of LGBT culture and history.

**Pronouns** (n.) — Words used to describe someone in the third person. Common pronouns include she, they, and he. When one is stating their pronouns, they are often in the format of subject/possessive such as “she/her” or “they/them.”

**Queen** (n.) — Often used in gay slang to refer to flamboyant or effeminate gay men. The term can either be pejorative or celebrated as a type of self-identification.

**Queer** (adj.) — An umbrella term referring to those who are not straight. This term is commonly used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by the LGBT+ community in recent years.

**Questioning** (adj.) — Referring to being unsure of one's own sexual orientation, sexual identity, gender, or all three.

**Sex** (n.) — The biological makeup of a person, determined by their genitalia, chromosomes, one's reproductive function.

**Straight** (adj.) — A term referring to heterosexual people.

**Top** (n.) — The penetrative partner during sex.

**Tranny** (n.) — A slur referring to transgender people.

**Transgender** (adj.) — Referring or relating to a person whose identity and gender does not correspond with the sex they were assigned at birth.

**Transphobia** (n.) — Prejudice towards transgender people. Includes using slurs, not using correct pronouns, deadnaming, misgendering, etc.

**Transition** (n.) — The act of socially, physically, or medically changing one's appearance or presentation to better align with one's gender identity. Not necessary to be transgender.

**Transvestite** (n.) — An outdated and offensive term referring to crossdressers, gay men, and transgender people.

**Twink** (n.) — A slang term for a gay male who is young-looking and slim.

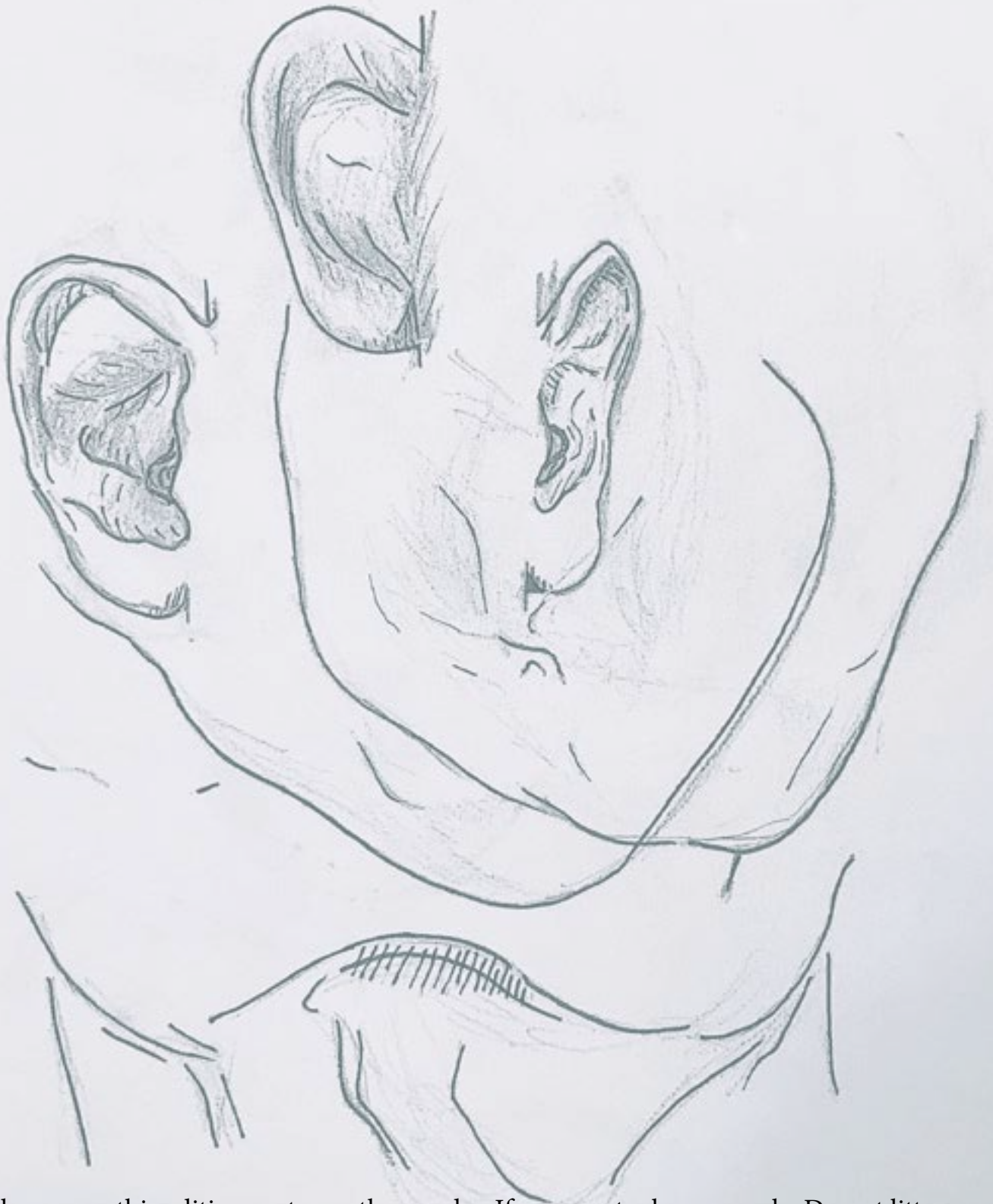
**Vers** (adj.) — Someone who is willing to perform, or has no preference between, top or bottom.

**WLW** (n.) — Woman loving woman; includes lesbians, bisexual women, and any other woman attracted to women.

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# Look Around

This edition of Queer Press was written, but not distributed by students at Harding University. This Magazine was not distributed on Harding University campus.



Please pass this edition on to another reader. If you must, please recycle. Do not litter.

